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## **Getting together, living together, thinking together: Management Development at Tata Sons 1940-1960**

### **Abstract**

This paper analyses internal management development activities at Tata Sons during the 1940s and 1950s in India. The existing literature has concentrated on the establishment of management education programmes at Universities, and our understanding of in-company managerial training and development activities remains very limited. The paper challenges the commonly held assumption that the American influence on Indian higher education in the post-war period was decisive in shaping management education in general. After 1947, Tata Sons continued to look to Great Britain for management development models to build the internal capacities and management culture that would make governing a diversified business group practical.

**Key words:** Tata; management education; Henley staff college, governmentality

## Introduction

Management education in India is widely considered to have formally commenced in 1953, with the opening of the first Indian Business School – the Indian Institute of Social Welfare and Business Management (Jha and Kumar 2011). This first university led initiative was soon followed by other degree programmes offered by the Universities of Delhi, Bombay, and Madras in 1955, and Andhra in 1957. These early developments in providing formal degrees in management – and the later establishment of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad and Kolkata – have dominated the scholarly discussion of the development of Indian managers since independence in 1947 (Matthai 1980; Sheth 1991; Bandyopathyay 1991; Sahu 1991; D'mello 1999; Bhattachraya 2010; Saha 2012). The interest in the development of, in particular, the Indian Institutes of Management has been in relation to the involvement of the Ford Foundation and the extent of local decision making about management education approaches, and the degree to which establishing American educational principles were conditions for financial aid (Sancheti 1986; Cooke 2004, 2006; Kipping et al 2008; Srinivas 2012).

Post-colonial perspectives on management education have added an important element of critique to the story of the transfer of management knowledge from the US to other global north countries before those of the global south. A key point of debate has been the extent to which American management theorists and practice has been privileged, while the existing management praxis of the 'receiving' cultures has been ignored or denigrated (Joy and Poonamalee 2013). We note the continued importance of examining issues of hybridity, transfer, and facadism in the historical accounts of the development of managers, but observe that the majority of such studies have focused on higher education and degree programmes rather than internal management development programmes operated by specific firms. Even when specific firms are considered, for example in Russell's study of Bell Canada, the frame of reference has been the role of management theory rather than the firm itself (Russell 2015). Undoubtedly, the history of educational institutes is more accessible to researchers than the decisions made by nascent training functions within organisations. However, it is important to examine the history of in-house management development in addition to a nation's higher education provision of management education. The choices made by organisations about how their internal management development programmes were organised, designed, and delivered

reveals much about institution building as well as the transfer of management knowledge globally. Additionally, in internal management development programmes, we see different local adaptations being made in relation to pedagogy, the idea of the manager, and practical content.

We focus on the Indian conglomerate Tata and its approach to management development in the 1940s and 1950s. Tata and educational initiatives were closely linked. Tata's founder, Jamsetji Tata, established an educational endowment in 1892 that helped students of all castes to pursue higher education, and his personal wealth also financed the Indian Institute of Science, established in 1911. This was consistent with Tata's business ethic that combined a Parsee stress on societal improvement with an Indian nationalism that emphasised the country's self-reliance (Worden 2003, pp 151-2). Later generations continued the connection to education by founding the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 1936, which specialised in research on social sciences, public policy and economics (Jha and Kumar 2011). Tata Iron and Steel executives were also closely involved in the pre-Independence education commissions charged with investigating the options for the establishment of institutes of technology in India (Ganesh 1979). But it was in the late 1940s, when the company began to gradually move away from the managing agent system, that the company also considered their *internal* training of managers. And whilst, at a national level, Tata were supportive of US educational partnerships, when looking for models of in-house training they preferred to emulate Britain's Administrative Staff College at Henley.

The spread of the administrative staff college model is a lesser-examined route in the global spread of management ideas from the Anglo-American centre to the industrialising periphery. Originating from wartime planning in Britain, the residential cohort model is of interest for its pedagogical approach and its ambiguous relationship to the idea that leadership was a matter of character and experience, rather than theory and task mastery. Here we argue that this pedagogical model was a way of developing managers who operated with high degrees of operational autonomy within Tata's normative framework. In discussing self-managing managers, we can usefully invoke Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality. Governmentality was an unfinished project introduced by Foucault in a series of lectures that has become a vital resource for the understanding of contemporary neo-liberalism (McKinlay and Pezet 2010). By governmentality, Foucault was enquiring about the genealogy of modern liberal forms of governance. That is, forms of governance that accept the inevitability – indeed,

desirability – of individual freedom. Good governance maximises individual freedom *and* the benefits to the population. The benefits and risks of governance are assessed at the level of the population: maximising the responsible decision-making of autonomous individuals becomes the vehicle for effective, efficient governance.

The phasing out of the managing agent system was crucial in triggering Tata's development of cadres of corporate managers and leaders. Management development was a vehicle for establishing a coherent executive culture within a loosely coupled conglomerate.

We begin with an examination of the history of the Administrative Staff College at Henley, its approach to management development, and its adoption by, for the most part, Commonwealth nations. The second section examines Tata in the context of the organisational and national developments of the 1940s. Finally, we look at the use of the Henley model by Tata as an adaptation, rather than an adoption, of the Henley model. Here, we stress that Tata's management development was pragmatic in its acceptance of high degrees of operational autonomy for managers and its efforts to construct, rather than impose, a normative framework to regulate leadership practices.

### **The Administrative Staff College, Henley.**

The Administrative Staff College, Henley was created as the result of a series of discussions held by the British Government in the last three years of the Second World War. Over a hundred individuals – representing politics, industry, trade unions, the civil service, banking, and academia – were involved in discussions about the readiness of British industry for the return to peacetime production. The concern was that 'heavy burdens' would be placed on those individuals who would be moving from departmental management to senior management in the context of post-war recovery (Cornwall-Jones 1985, pp. ix); the college would provide management development opportunities for those managers. Lyndall Urwick was one of the key figures lobbying for the establishment of a national staff college (Wild 2002; Brech et al 2010, pp. 8, 14, 17-18). Unsurprisingly, Henley derived much of its pedagogy from military staff colleges, especially the Imperial Defence College. There was a widespread acceptance that military training methods produced results, and that the role of the senior manager was

akin to the art of generalship (Nettle 2014; Ritson and Parker 2016). But the defining method borrowed from the military colleges was the idea of the 'syndicate', a group of around eight individuals who learn together as a group, sharing their experiences and interpreting theory and ideas in relation to those experiences (Watson 1984).

Despite the involvement and tacit support of government, Henley was – from its inception - a private, non-profit company, rather than a public body. Keeping Henley outside of the public sector allowed it to remain closely connected to its business sponsors, whilst at the same time being open to civil service and trade union involvement (Guerriero-Wilson 2011). In positioning itself outside of the higher education sector, Henley represented a continuation of British thinking about the basis of managerial effectiveness as necessarily practical rather than theoretical that would not be challenged until the late 1950s (Locke 1989, pp 155-6; Larson 2008). Henley was, in effect, a superior sort of residential offering in the same practical, experiential format favoured by a number of professional associations that existed in the inter-war period. Professional associations such as the Office Management Association, the Institute of Industrial Administration, the Institute of Labour Management, the Works Management Association ran night-schools and offered diplomas related to distinct areas of business (Guerriero-Wilson 2015). The post-war push would be to amalgamate many of these separate provisions into a single broadly recognised Diploma of Management. However, at this time, management education remained the prerogative of the professional associations, the private sector, and with a strong emphasis on practitioner knowledge (Roper 1999; Guerriero-Wilson 2011).

Dedicated studies of Henley, whether celebratory or critical, say little about the genesis of the pedagogical design decisions of the early 1950s (Dimock 1956; Allen 1979; Vernardakis 1982; Cornwall-Jones 1985). However, the basic design of the General Management Course is clear. It was an eleven week course, which comprised ten or eleven men and women in a syndicate, with each course cohort comprising six syndicates. The cohort was known as a session. The Henley programme was considered very short compared to programmes with similar aims, albeit with different pedagogical models, that lasted up to nine months (Cornwall-Jones 1985). The preferred mix of participants on each session was outlined by Cornwall-Jones, a facilitator on the programme from 1950-1957, as individuals from the civil service (6), nationalised industries (8-9), private industry (42-4), overseas – mostly Commonwealth nations (6), local

government (1-2), and armed services (1-2). The College took great care to select the members of each syndicate with the aim that they would be able to share different experiences, and to challenge each other:

“[the differences] ... would invite, if not compel, the individual to compare his [sic] knowledge, his experience, his outlook, his style, and his capacity ... to find out that many of their problems would not be so different from, and indeed would be similar ... to his own ... Discoveries like these, as they unfolded in the individual member’s mind, would broaden his sympathy and quicken his perception, surely leading to a better understanding of other people’s way of life and point of view” (Cornwall-Jones 1985, pp. 4).

Before each session the subjects were reviewed, tasks revised, and guest speakers allocated. Each syndicate operated under the chairmanship of one of its members, and a different chair and secretary was appointed for each separate subject covered by the course (Dimock 1956). Over the eleven-week programme, each member of the syndicate would therefore take the chair; and be responsible for co-ordinating the task allocated to the syndicate, ensuring its completion in a fixed time period. The chair oversaw the discussions that went into each project, and reported back to the rest of the session. Each syndicate was allocated a facilitator. The role of the facilitator was not to teach, but to help the syndicate achieve the learning embedded in the subject tasks. The facilitator briefed the chair, but was forbidden to discuss the substance of the subject. The ‘higher responsibility’, as Cornwall-Jones explained it, was a commitment to preparing the syndicate members to make use of their own talents and to learn as much as they could from the experience (Cornwall-Jones 1985). Cornwall-Jones experienced a repeated anxiety about what this meant in practice, and developed a rough code of behaviour to guide him as to when it might be appropriate to intervene in, rather than just observe, the group. He felt that it was wrong to intervene when things were going well; appropriate to offer his view if asked directly, but not if he thought that the individual or group needed to uncover the information for themselves; but that he was free to ignore these rules ‘just because [he] was human’ and ‘had something to say’ (ibid pp. 11).

Groupwork was central to the Henley experience. But there were also lectures provided to the whole session, evening talks by invited guests, as well as syndicate presentations on the biographies of key industry leaders, or more ‘off the cuff’ presentations (Cornwall-Jones 1985).

Case studies were also a feature of the curriculum in relation to specific topics. For example, when studying technological change, a syndicate may visit a company to study how they adapted to international competition by upgrading machinery. Henley also had a large library, and subscribed to the key economic and industrial journals of the day (Dimock 1956). But, the focus of the development was the experience of chairing the syndicate, and the experience of each syndicate member of adjusting to the group dynamics.

“I wanted them to be able to disagree without being disagreeable ... I hoped I had an ally in the chairman, who might know more than I about handling people. Often he and some members of the group were discovering that the handling of groups or equals had charms of its own which were new to them, and I did not want to disturb the process of discovery in this more than I did in anything else” (Cornwall-Jones 1985, pp. 15).

The course was, therefore, less concerned with instruction and the transfer of generalizable knowledge than with providing spaces for experiential learning. The balance of cases, lectures and projects was carefully designed to set the conditions for – but not the content of – learning. The emphasis was on using the experience of other syndicate members as a resource to understand and apply knowledge. This was the purpose behind non-directive facilitation of syndicates. The aim of the learning design was to help each participant ‘learn, develop and mature on an individual basis’ (Allen 1979, pp. 68). As the programme became established, and the interest shifted to explaining how to establish similar colleges throughout the Commonwealth, the emphasis on personal development receded. But the underlying rationale for focusing on learning rather than instruction was that senior management roles required emotional development more than task mastery i.e. sharing responsibility, dealing with different professional attitudes, and evaluating specialist inputs (Vernardarkis 1982, pp 28).

### **Making Tata Corporate**

Tata Sons began operations in 1868 as a trading company. The company was established by Jamsetji Nasarwanji Tata and traded in textiles and other commodities. It soon moved into manufacturing with the purchase of an old textile mill in Bombay. After selling the mill for a profit, Tata formed the Central India Spinning and Weaving Company at Nagpur. The company



was renamed the Empress Mill in 1877, and quickly became the pre-eminent textile mill in India. In the early twentieth century Tata created several new companies, i.e. the Taj Hotel (1903), Tata Steel (1907), Tata Hydro Electric Power Supply (1910), Andra Valley Power Supply (1916), Tata Power (1919), and Tata Oil Mills (1917). A merger of India Cements (created in 1912) the larger Associated Cements in 1926. After the creation of New India Assurance (1921), the pace of new company creation slowed with the 1930s seeing the launch of Tata Chemicals in 1939, and Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company in 1945, later renamed Tata Motors (Lala 1991, pp. 70-74). Structurally, Tata relied on a form of management at a distance that owed much to the managing agent model. In a conglomerate with a strategy of unrelated diversification, after 1947, professional operational managers replaced profit-sharing agents, but continued to exercise high degrees of operational autonomy.

Tata Sons, in common with many Indian business houses, operated as a managing agency. The managing agency system was the most common form of corporate management in India until the 1950s. It was a system that first developed in nineteenth century India, but was seized upon in London as a way to manage joint stock companies operating in the subcontinent, and whose shareholders had no first hand knowledge of the business (Kling 1966; Kapila and Kapila 1995). Within India, the managing agency system offered families and partnerships, a way to attract capital investment from local banks into basic joint stock companies (Loknathan 1935). Often much bigger than the companies they managed, the managing agent's main responsibilities were to guarantee sound management that allowed foreign capital to be raised to finance the company start up, and then manage its day to day operations (Kapila and Kapila 1995). In return, the managing agents were paid a commission, normally a percentage of revenues, sales or profits. Managing agents were accountable to the board of directors of the company that appointed them, and in most cases the agents formed part of the board of the companies they were paid to manage (Rungta 1970). Tata Sons were instrumental, therefore, in the formation, financing, and management of their portfolio of companies by holding the Chairmanship of the board and by appointing a director-in-charge who oversaw operations by working closely with the management. The managing agency model was popular because it was a way of earning income from a company unrelated to investment or profitability, a feature that eventually led to limits being placed on the number of companies that could be controlled by a managing agent in the Companies Act of 1956, and the complete abolition of this model by 1968 (Kapila and Kapila 1995). The three major Indian managing companies, of which Tata

was the largest, adapted to the change in legislation by the purchase of strategic shareholdings, financed by state-owned banks that also held substantial stakes in the same companies (ibid).

The challenges of running organisations that spanned several different industries – from textiles, to hotels, to steel, and motor manufacturing – had become clear to Tata by the mid-1940s. People management problems prompted Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata (JRD), who had become Chairman in 1938, to examine a number of personnel management solutions and introduce greater ‘professionalism’ in a ‘co-ordinated’ way (Sabavala and Lala 1986, pp. 117; Lala 1991, pp. 196). JRD created Tata Industries in 1945 in anticipation of post-war expansion. All agency contracts from Tata Sons were transferred to this new company. New board members were appointed based on their professional expertise. Tata Industries became the managing agents for all Tata companies: the directors of all Tata companies sat on the Board of Tata Industries (Lala 1993, pp. 292). However, JRD remained concerned about the lack of attention given to the development of individuals who were current, or future, heads of departments as well as the supply of future managers into the different companies.

“If our operation required the employment of, say, 30,000 machine tools, we would undoubtedly have a special staff or department to look after them, to keep them in repair, replace them when necessary, maintain their efficiency, protect them from damage etc. But when employing 30,000 human beings each with a mind and soul of his own, we seem to have assumed that they would look after themselves and that there was no need for a separate organisation to deal with the human problem involved” (Sabavala and Lala 1986, pp. 117).

Between 1940 and 1960 Tata adopted a centralised and increasingly strategic approach to management development. The prelude was Tata’s involvement in national debates about managerial and technical education. From 1954 Tata deployed internal management development programmes (Lala 1993, pp. 292). Tata’s experience is unique in the Indian context because it was deeply involved in national policy-making and was one of the handful of firms to initiate and implement systematic internal management developments in the two decades after Independence (Myers 1958, pp. 112).

## Management Development

The Indian Government turned to its major industrial companies when, in the 1940s, it created a range of advisory committees responsible for planning India's new institutions of state and economic development. Tata was deeply embedded in this process. For example, the National Council for Technical Education was established in 1946 under the Chairmanship of TT Krishnamachari, a newly elected senator, to explore more 'modern' approaches to management education. In turn, in 1948-49, this committee created the Industrial Administration Business and Management (IABM) Committee, chaired by Sir Jehangir Ghandy, General Manager of TISCO and a Director of Tata Sons. Ghandy's committee reported to the Government in 1953, with three main recommendations. First, it suggested the formation of an Administrative Staff College modelled on Henley's Staff College. Second, to establish a Board of Management Studies to consider partnerships and models for university level management education. Third, it recommended the establishment of a National Institute of Management as a standing committee to coordinate all future management education initiatives (Myers 1958, pp. 11; Hill et al 1973, pp. 11-13).

Between late 1940s and the early 1950s several Tata executives travelled internationally, examining a range of options for the development of India's managers, and brought that knowledge back into Tata at the time it was considering its own approach to management development. As part of the continuing research into the applicability of the Staff College model to India, the general secretaries of the IABM committee, a civil servant and a Tata employee - Krishna Khosla, Deputy Agent - spent three months at Henley in 1954 studying its methods (TISCO News 1954). There were further visits to Henley by Tata staff in 1956 and 1957 by the Registrar of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and also Sir Jehangir Ghandy.

At the same time as Tata executives were involved in advising the Indian government on how to develop a new type of industrial manager for India as a whole, Tata was concerned about the same issue in their own companies. JRD Tata wanted to create the mechanisms for a common and distinctive Tata management culture based on a sense of consensus and authority based on technical knowledge combined with individual leadership (Lala 1993, pp. 292; Lala 1995, pp. 72-73). Early experiments focused on personnel management rather than management development, notably the efforts to create 'formal and systematic' approaches to recruiting staff into various Tata firms (Bhabha n/d). Not all those early experiments were

successful. The 1948 'Superior Staff Recruitment Committee' initiative, comprised senior executives such as Homi Modi, Ardeshir Dalaal, John Matthai and JRD. Little thought was given into how new recruits would be integrated into the organisation and the three people recruited through the initial scheme all left quickly. Undeterred, JRD relaunched the idea in 1954 as the 'Tata Cadre'. Cadre members were encouraged, upon recruitment, to move between different companies and functional areas, before settling down in one of the companies. Since there was no management college that could produce the sort of junior manager that JRD envisaged, he concluded that Tata needed its own management college that promising recruits could join. This became the Tata Administrative Service (TAS), and recruited direct from university graduates.

Tata held its first 'managers' conference and seminar' in 1955. This 'conference' was both a forerunner of more systematic management development projects and continued as a stand-alone event, provided an opportunity for the 'top echelons' of Tata management to 'exchange notes on subjects of mutual interest, pool their wisdom and draw upon others' experiences' (TISCO News 1962). The conference was designed to include inputs from senior Tata executives, such as JRD, Jehangir Ghandy, H.P. Dastur, and Ardeshir Shroff, as well as visiting academics such as Charles A. Myers, from MIT.<sup>1</sup> The initial idea was for the conference to run for up to three days, and each conference addressed a particular company concern, and worked towards a set of recommendations that could be actioned. Whilst the directors were brought together by the Management Conference, and the new recruits were inducted via the TAS, there was still an identified gap regarding the development of middle managers. John Matthai and Rustum Choksi pitched the staff college idea to JRD as a place where existing Tata managers would focus on the 'organisation's own character and spirit, its problems and needs', modelled on – but not reproducing – the Henley experience.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Myers visited India between 1954 and 1955 to study problems facing labour, management and government in the industrial development of the Indian economy. The project was part of a Ford Foundation funded project on Inter-University study of labour problems in economic development.

<sup>2</sup> While other Tata executives had visited Henley in early 1950s, John Matthai and Rustum Choksi were responsible for organising the Tata Staff College. Dr John Matthai received education in law and economics. He joined Tata Sons in 1940 and assumed directorship in 1944. He was on the board of several companies managed by Tata Sons. In addition, he held various government posts including finance member of the Viceroy's executive council in 1946 and India's finance minister from 1949 to 1950. In 1950s he held brief stints as Vice Chancellor of University of Bombay and a member of the first governing board of Administrative Staff College of India. Professor Rustum Choksi was a director of Tata Sons and Tata Industries. Between 1950s and 1980s he was a key decision maker at the Sir Dhorabji Tata Trust.

The adaptations made to the Henley model by Tata were consistent with the wider managerial views of JRD and his senior management team. JRD was a student of the Human Relations approach, and delivered an address on the subject in Oxford in 1956 (TISCO News 1956). He referred to social surveys on internal migration patterns, and urban development around large industrial plants such as those of Tata Steel in Jamshedpur. Industrial and urban development were driving social change such as the loosening of the caste system and improving the status of women. Urban development around large plants drove the creation of markets for outlying villages, increased demand for medical treatment, and offered the possibility of fuller social and cultural lives. JRD saw the human relations ‘problem’ in developing countries like India as being addressed by providing for the basic material needs of workers, providing inside and outside of the factory the means for self-expression and fulfilment; together with the means for personal recognition through advancement and promotion. JRD considered it possible for industry in general, and Tata in particular, to be much more than a source of employment, but also a community, and a way of life (ibid).

Tata managers were integral to JRD’s humanist developmental vision. Training within a community of managers combined self-development with a shared experience, and offered the prospect of the career as an economic and moral project. From the late 1940s onwards the thinking, and experimentation, Tata’s management development programme reflected these principles. For example, the performance rating form that was used to assess managers who entered via the Tata Cadre scheme listed twenty qualities a Tata manager needed to possess, develop and demonstrate. Of the twenty qualities, only two were task related. The rest were concerned with the individual’s attitude and demeanour e.g. “What degree of intelligence, speed, accuracy, resourcefulness etc does he show in performing task entrusted to him? How is he on executive skill, viz, given the opportunity can he plan effectively, arrive at workable solutions and put them into practice? (Anonymous n/d). In terms of ‘character’, future Tata managers were rated against ideals of ‘favourable general impression[s]’, and whether they possessed good carriage, manners, poise, courtesy. Stability of emotions was prized and was best demonstrated by the individual’s ability to receive criticism and endure set-backs with equanimity. Managers were expected to be respected *and* liked, sympathetic and understanding to others, and able to listen ‘without bias’. A manager of the right character would be the sort of person to whom others would naturally accept as a leader. These judgements were to be reached through inspection and were reported narratively. Judgements were searching about

the individual's leadership, despite the absence of numerical coding and so statistical comparability.

In summary, the Henley model was adopted and then adapted, for three main reasons. Firstly, key decision makers in Tata were familiar with the Henley approach through their involvement on the working party that was charged with considering how to develop a national administrative staff college. Secondly, the Henley model offered flexibility through its emphasis on personal development, as opposed to task or specific forms of knowledge. The third, more nuanced explanation, is that the management ideas of JRD Tata led them towards management development that stressed a collective culture, and an emphasis on individual character, self-awareness and personal development.

### **Tata Staff College**

In many ways, the Tata Staff College, was a refinement of the Management Conference approach rather than a variant of the TAS. The Tata Staff College was formed in order – in keeping with the Henley approach and JRD's inclinations – to 'cultivate awareness' rather than to 'supply knowledge and information'. It was not 'subjects but people who matter' (Tata Staff College 1956a). The college would give opportunity for staff of various Tata companies working in different industries and different parts of country for 'getting together, living together, thinking together, and develop a corporate sense' (Matthai 1956 a). It was thought that the 'staff college' would have achieved its aim if was able to 'send members back to their work' with 'increased awareness of their responsibilities, a greater flexibility of mind, a more informed understanding of public affairs and with readiness and enthusiasm to meet the needs of a changing situation (Matthai 1956 b).

The Tata Staff College's objectives were to:

1. Cultivate an awareness of what Tata stands for,
2. Realise where [Tata] stand in the changed conditions of modern India,
3. Provide some opportunity for the study of management and business problems at various levels and in relation to the different companies,

4. Have a forum for discussion and exchange of information and ideas on 'Tata' problems and projects, and thereby,
5. Create a fellowship amongst ourselves.

(Source: Choksi n/d; Tata Staff College 1957)

The College, formed in 1956, eventually found a permanent home in Pune in 1966, after a somewhat peripatetic existence. Adopting the residential model from Henley, the property in Pune was an impressive, and extensive, country home built for a wealthy family, set amongst fifteen acres of landscaped grounds and capable of housing up to sixty students and staff. The college was expected to function in the cooler season, i.e. the period between December and February when Pune experienced milder weather conditions thought most conducive to education.

The core educational staff at the college was envisaged to be small, just three full-time facilitators. The main input was to be provided by senior officers from Tata who were identified as having the specialised knowledge to deliver lectures, while always returning to general questions of leadership. As with the Tata 'management conferences', Tata directors and guest speakers would also be invited to address the course attendees. There would be two course 'sessions' of four to five weeks duration in each season, with approximately twelve participants attending each session. A session was limited to twelve participants as this permitted 'close touch' among them and with College staff and Tata's senior officers. Participants would usually be between thirty and forty years of age, with reasonable levels of managerial experience, and drawn from across various Tata companies. It was the responsibility of individual companies to nominate staff identified as on the cusp of promotion to senior operational roles.

The primary method of training was Henley's 'syndicate method', but in a 'simplified form' (Tata Staff College 1956 a). The training combined lectures and discussion. A wide range of subjects were to be studied, not all of them related to the commercial interests of the Tata Group. Participants on the early sessions had access to books from Tata's Economics and Statistics Department, as well as the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Programme administrators ensured that books on history, politics and literature were stocked 'since the purpose of the training (was) for more effective service in Tata' (Choksi n/d). This signalled that management development was something other than technical training. The resources for

aspiring leaders were not restricted to training manuals or their practical experience. The schedule for each day of the session comprised three time blocks. Mornings were focused on ‘instructional’ and commercial topics given by senior Tata executives, with time afterwards for discussion. These were led by senior Tata executives. The block after lunch was dedicated to ‘study circles, group discussions ... and even more light hearted extempore speaking.’ The evening session, which included dinner, was given over to a guest speakers to ‘stimulating and enlightening’ talk by visiting experts such as Lyndall Urwick, government ministers, and Tata directors, including JRD (Tata Staff College 1956 a). As at Henley, there was a strong emphasis on group assignments. It was expected that this would provide each participant an opportunity of ‘initiating and leading discussion or preparing a report’. The underlying belief was that best training is provided by ‘contact with one another’. As the session was residential there was also time provided for activities that would promote the ‘art of living together’ (Matthai 1956 a; Tata Staff College 1956 c). The temporary community of the Pune college was a metaphor for the permanent community of Tata management.

[Figure One here]

### **Sessions One to Six: 1956-1960.**

The first session of the General Management Course was held at the Turf Club, Pune with 18 participants drawn from eight separate Tata companies. Participants were aged between 32 and 48 years of age, and all were male (Tata Staff College 1956 b). The timetable of the First Session suggests Tata made only minor changes to the Henley syndicate model. The adoption of the Henley model as a direct result of Khosla’s attendance at Henley was acknowledged in the public report of the First Session, as was Khosla’s role as one of the programme’s facilitators. The comments taken from the participants’ evaluation forms noted that:

“Mr Khosla (of TISCO) saw the syndicate system in operation at Henley and adapted it to our needs...”

“At Henley, Mr Khosla told us, there were often sharp differences of opinion in a syndicate but these were usually ironed out around the College bar – a facility that could not be made available to us at Poona” (Tata Staff College 1956 b, pp. 6-7).



In practice, given that each syndicate appeared to work in exactly the same fashion as it did in Henley, although minus the bar, the adaptation that Khosla made in terms of design was in only having two set syndicates in the programme, which meant that there were fewer opportunities for each participant to lead a syndicate through an extended task and/or to act as secretary. The syndicate teaching model gained general approval:

“[Syndicate work] is based on the theory that management cannot be taught as a subject. Management could only be learnt by doing management, i.e. by self-instruction. This method gives incentive to and develops administrative skills.”

“The mental discipline and training that one acquires from working in a syndicate cannot be over-stressed ...[syndicate work] provides training in the art of working with and through people, of conducting business and integrating differences through the conference method.” (Tata Staff College 1956 b, pp. 7)

The participants’ approval was not altogether surprising since John Matthai’s opening remarks to the First Session stressed the value of syndicate work, a message reinforced throughout the course. JRD Tata’s final evening address also stressed the importance of syndicates to Tata’s management development system. Despite the assertions that management could not be taught as a subject, the emphasis in the First Session remained somewhat skewed towards instruction rather than self-discovery sessions.

But whilst the syndicate method might have been a pedagogical decision at Henley, it was a relational decision on the part of Tata and of Matthai, Choksi and JRD Tata. Syndicates were used extensively across the range of middle and senior management conferences, training courses, and events (Tata Staff College 1953; 1962; 1964) And all were deployed with the intention that the syndicate method would foster closer relationships, and eventually a common management culture, across all the Tata companies. That the individual *was* and would remain a leader within Tata was signified by their participation in the development programme. Equally, being defined as a leader signified their autonomy, agency and responsibility for modernising the organisation (Jacques 1996, pp. 114-115). In his address to the First Session, JRD Tata insisted that:

“he recognised the difficulties faced the organisers in an experiment of this kind ... but the need to establish closer relationships in such an organisation was all the greater. The conference method, which had been adopted in recent years, and the college plan were means to that end. He asked members to carry back to their own places of work the message of fellowship and the gospel of good human relations ... It should be the constant endeavour of sound management to make men at all levels feel that they ‘belonged.’” (Tata Staff College 1956 b, pp. 9)

One other element of the Henley model that Tata adapted was the programme’s emphasis on the discussion and study of liberal arts subjects. Session One had invited Marcus Bach, Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Iowa State University, to talk to participants about the role of religion in industry. But subsequent Sessions expanded on this element of topics of general interest, science and the arts and humanities. Session Six, for example, included discussions on ‘Life in central India circa BC 1000’, ‘Indian Paintings’, and ‘International Locust Control’. Suggestions for topics to be covered in subsequent sessions included space conquest, Everest expeditions, and ‘women’s problems’ (Anonymous 1962). Again, it was an element of the pedagogical design that was explained at the start of the Sessions, most notably by John Matthai at the start of Session Two:

“You cannot isolate business from the rest of a community’s life ... I am one of those who believe that unless a certain measure of general education is combined with scientific and technical education, you are not fitting yourself properly ... I was very much interested to know that in a place like MIT today, some time is allocated in their syllabus for subjects of a purely cultural character... It seems to me that American educationalists and business men have discovered almost instinctively the needs for integrating the various activities of a community together...” (Matthai n/d)

And again at the start of Session Three.

“You may question why such subjects as economic planning ... important landmarks in philosophical and political thought, and anthropology, which have little bearing on your day-to-day work, should be included on this course... we should endeavour to combine science and culture, and broaden our mind and vision, and seek fullness of

life, which alone can lead to wisdom and happiness ... I might add that it is for the same reason that the study of humanities receives special emphasis in engineering courses in the USA. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for example ....”(Tata Staff College 1957, pp. 9)

The greater part of the papers held by the Tata Central Archive on the Staff College in this period relate to reports of, and reports on, the First Session. The eighteen participants were interviewed at the start of the Session, at the mid-way point, and two ninety minute ‘looking ahead’ sessions were included in the last week of the session designed to provide feedback to the college and executives. Overall, the course was judged to have been a success – although three participants had withdrawn shortly before the start of the course and the resulting loss of fee income meant that the course incurred a loss. Thirty senior officers had attended the session, eleven directors, and twenty external guest speakers. ‘Not much importance’ was attached to the somewhat uneven distribution of individuals who attended the First Session in terms of their age and positions. The report stated that the varied companies within the group, varying salaries, and the difficulties of releasing some staff, it was likely that there would always be some clustering of age and companies. Both the participants, and the staff, reported that the intensive first week of the course and then a gradual tapering off of the workload was important, although the absence of recreation or physical activity was considered mistaken.

The subsequent sessions, had a greater emphasis on shared recreation. Session Six included time for a participants’ cricket match. Increasing the time for cultural discussions, and preparation time for syndicate work were matters of degree, not principle. Participants reported that they felt involved in decision making about the programme, although the published timetable renders this claim suspect. Perhaps the participants’ perception of their involvement came from their sense that they were encouraged to criticise and grumble at design decisions. However, the general view of the participants was that the basic design of the course was sound and it was largely matters of internal planning and financing that required discussion: how best to expand the programme and to maximise the involvement of Tata Directors. The overall model for the General Management Course remained stable throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s. When the college had a permanent home Tata could look to providing specialist training but this was to complement the cultural thrust of the inaugural management development programmes (Tata Staff College, 1956 c).

The Tata programme deliberately chose not to offer specialised functional training. For Tata and the programme's participants, the course was valuable, but that value was intangible. In this sense, Tata's management development was geared towards developing the norms that would guide the actions of senior operational managers beyond the direct control of Tata's corporate centre. Developing a normative framework for Tata was both a recognition of the practical limits of central control and a practical response to the inherent difficulties of managing at a distance in a sprawling conglomerate.

## **Conclusion**

Organisational histories that focus on the development of their management population, and the ideas and pedagogy that support them, are largely missing from the academic field of business history. This absence is regrettable, both for the loss of insight such firm level studies would provide for the field of human resource development, and also for the complementary information they could provide in mapping the global spread of management ideas and practices in the twentieth century. Without fine-grained studies of management development, we are left with only histories of institutional management education as a proxy for an understanding of how industry was developing its managers in-house.

We stress this element of the Tata approach in order to put both the adoption *and* adaptation of the Henley model in context. The Administrative Staff College at Henley was a much imitated model. From the first, Henley welcomed participants from international companies, and received a steady stream of interested visitors with whom it was happy to discuss its experience of running and positioning the programme. Requests to release staff to help establish similar institutions in - predominantly - Commonwealth countries were refused on workload grounds until 1953, when staff were occasionally released for extended periods to help at national level (Cornwall-Jones 1985). There was no policy that supported the release of staff to help individual companies set up internal management training centres. Tata benefitted from their involvement with several Indian government study trips, committees, and planning bodies on the subject of national management development and education after 1947. They were able to study models of management development around the world, and to send representatives on courses such as those run by Henley.

But Tata were selective in their use of models that they saw in operation in Britain and the US. Adopting educational models for use in your own organisation is not the same process as negotiating partnerships at national level, or subject to the same dynamics in terms of funding and dealing with organisations such as the Ford Foundation. There was, in the early 1950s, a period of experimentation and ad hoc arrangements in human resource development within Tata, as with the short-lived 'Superior Staff Recruitment Committee' and early management conferences. The exposure to Henley, and its syndicate idea, was useful because it matched the existing management philosophy of JRD Tata rather than influencing it. The syndicate style allowed for the inclusion of local technical concerns and pre-occupations whilst reinforcing JRD Tata's own views on the primacy of character, belonging, and self-development within a specific cultural context. Tata's management development programme was based on adaptation, not adoption.

In Foucault, liberalism encounters the intractable problem of how to avoid governing 'too much' (Foucault 2007, pp. 319). In Tata, by contrast, to govern was to accept the practical limits of centralisation in a conglomerate built on the extreme decentralisation of the managing agency system. Equally, accepting organisational decentralisation was consistent with the Tata's fusion of religious and nationalist ideology and its emphasis on self-reliance. For the individual participant, Tata's management development had a dual purpose. First, the recognition and articulation of one's personal experience of leadership. Second, exposure to the emerging norms of Tata as a modernising organisation and how these norms were assessed. Through management development, the manager had to develop new 'arts of self-government' and understand that these were the ways that defined his relations to others and to the organisation (Foucault 1997, pp. 88; 2005 pp.252). Tata's management development was consistent with human relations. That is, to consider leadership as a set of individual qualities whose effectiveness are maximised if these were deployed consistently and in a contextually sensitive manner (Miller and Rose 1990, pp.26). Leadership was, then, no longer to be thought of solely as an individual asset but also as a collective and organisational resource. Tata's formal system of accountability were incapable of overcoming functional and spatial distance. Tata's management development programme was predicated upon a recognition that spatial and organisational distances could not be collapsed through administrative control from the centre. Developing managers to operate within normative parameters was also the pursuit of a more efficient form of managing Tata as a whole. Tata's management development programme was a way of understanding the diverse vocabularies of managing operationally

while developing a shared ontology of management in Tata. The making of 'Tata cadres' was the construction of reliable, responsible proxies for direct personal control from headquarters. Creating 'Tata cadres' was a necessary precondition to developing and centralising knowledge of managers and management practices at the organisation's operational peripheries (Scott 1998).

Tata's management development stressed the need for the individual to improve their self-awareness as necessary if they were to improve their effectiveness as a leader. Syndicate conversations around participants' experience of leading were inherently performative. Debates about common experiences of leadership inevitably carried practical imperatives about *how* the everyday behaviours of leadership. The management cadre became the target of government, simultaneously an object of knowledge *and* a means of government. Participation in conversations about leadership served to enlist the individual in the making of a new language of governing the self, others and Tata as an organisation.

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